Lex orandi, lex credendi

Towards a liturgical theology

by

Nicholas A. Jesson

University of St. Michael's College, Toronto

Toronto School of Theology

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Lex orandi, lex credendi: towards a liturgical theology

In his apostolic constitution defining the dogma of the Assumption of Mary, Pope Pius XII states that "the liturgy of the Church does not engender the Catholic faith, but rather springs from it, in such a way that the practices of the sacred worship proceed from the faith as the fruit comes from the tree."[1] Such a notion, apart from the context, sounds reasonable to many contemporary Christians. As the recent liturgical reforms have proceeded throughout the churches, there has been a liturgical *ressourcement* that has kept pace with the similar "return to the sources" in theological disciplines. The theological articulation of the churches has itself been reviewed and reformed, through ecumenical encounter and conciliar reflection. The liturgical reform movement has reflected the considerable *rapprochement* of the churches. From an ecumenical perspective, one can appreciate the great advances towards Christian unity that have been made visible through the liturgical reforms.

However, as logical as it might seem that liturgical reform would keep pace with theological reform, the notion that liturgy is dependent upon theology requires some examination. If it were true, then ecumenical dialogue on baptism, eucharist and ministry might be expected to have had more impact on the living experience of the churches. Alternatively, if the opposite were true, then ecumenical theology ought to take more seriously the *rapprochement* of contemporary liturgy. The obvious differences between churches with historical liturgical patterns and those with more informal worship styles should be taken more seriously if liturgical practice either determines or describes the fundamental doctrinal perspectives of a community.

In this essay, I want to explore the relationship of liturgy and theology as symbiotic disciplines. Each draws from the other, and provides for the other. The liturgy serves as both a reflection of theology, and as a norm for theological articulation. Correctly understood, liturgical theology is part of the theological articulation of the faith. This distinguishes it from liturgical studies, which is a descriptive study. The ancient adage "*lex orandi lex credendi*" is a central focus of the

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[1] Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (November 1, 1950), 20.

consideration of the relationship between liturgical theology and dogmatic theology. How the adage has been understood and applied will give insight into the contemporary relationship between liturgy and theology. However, before we explore the adage, we will first examine the meaning of the term "liturgy" to see what it might contribute to our discussion.

I. Liturgy: expanding our horizons

Liturgy is more than the repetition of ancient prayers, although it may involve that. Liturgy comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*,[2] which literally refers to the "service of God." In the earliest Greek inscriptions, the term has a civic context, in which it is used to refer to "the direct discharge of specific services to the body politic." These services, whether voluntary or compulsory, were offered at their own expense by all citizens with an income above a level fixed in law. An additional context is its cultic use. Here, "the idea is not that one can render service to the nation through the cultus."[3] Rather, the service that is provided is to the gods themselves. The development of the term in Judaic and Christian contexts gives it a considerably greater depth of meaning. In the Septuagint, the Greek term to translate the Hebrew is used in cultic contexts with only a few exceptions, and never in the civic context of the earlier Greek usage.

> [The noun *leitourgia*] is always used of the ministry of the priests and Levites in and at the sanctuary, especially the ministry of the priests at the altar ... Apart from a few exceptions the object of the ministry is neither the city, state, people, citizens, nor specific individuals. It is the tent, the house, the altar, God Himself, or the name of God.[4]

In the New Testament, the term is used quite sparingly. The LXX sense of the term is used in the majority of cases,[5] but a new nuance is found in Acts 13:2. Here a reference to the *leitourgeo* of God by a small group in Antioch represents a slight broadening of the term: it now consists of worship other than the prescribed cultic forms. Acts 13:2 "is the first to attest a transfer of the important [Old Testament] cultic term to the purely spiritual Christian service of God."[6] Paul's use in Romans

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[2] λειτουργια. cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), s.v. "λειτουργέω, λειτουργια".
[3] Ibid., 4: 219
[4] Ibid., 4: 221
[5] Heb. 8: 6, 9: 21, 10: 11; Lk. 1: 23. The cultic sense is employed to indicate the significance of Christ's death.
[6] TDNT 4: 226-27

15:27 and II Corinthians 9:12, referring to the collection for the congregation in Jerusalem, and in Philippians 2:30, to a personal service rendered to him by Epaphroditus, fall neither into the LXX cultic usage nor the earlier Greek civic usage. It refers to service towards another. The usage in this manner might however reflect Paul's perspective that these "services" are both good and holy. Though they are offered to Paul and to the needy in Jerusalem, such generosity is an act of ministry to God.

In Philippians 2:17 Paul speaks of being "poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and service [*leitourgia*] of your faith." This usage has a clear cultic nuance as in the Old Testament.[7] While the New Testament usage generally does not stray far from the cultic usage of the Old Testament, the term is never extended to the services of leadership in the Christian community: apostles, teachers, prophets, and such. According to the term's use in Hebrews, the self-offering of Christ fulfils the cultic service. The tasks of Christian leadership were not understood as comparable to the sacrificial cultus. The new task was to proclaim the *leitourgia* that has been fulfilled, once and for all, in Christ.

After the destruction of the temple in 67 or 70 AD, the Christian focus on the temple cultic worship would naturally have begun to move towards the more spiritual worship form already witnessed in Acts 13:2. This development would have occurred for both the Jewish-Christians and the Gentiles, although it would clearly be an easier transition for the Gentile community. In the *Apostolic Fathers*, we see the beginning of this transition from the Old Testament cultus to a new understanding:

> Particular note should be taken here of [I Clement 40 ff.]. The authority of orderly office in the community is to be protected. The author takes the cultic hierarchy of the [Old Testament] as an example. The tasks of the high-priest, priests, Levites and the λαϊκος ανθρωπος are all prescribed by specific regulations (40.5). Hence each member of the Christian community must please God in his own place and not transgress τον ώρισμένον της λειτουργίας αυτου κανόνα (41.1). If here λειτουργία refers to the task of every member of the community, in 44.2-6 it applies specifically to that of the bishops and presbyters.[8]

[7] Ibid., 4: 227
[8] Ibid., 4: 228

Where the New Testament had considered the cultic function fulfilled in Christ, I Clement understands the cultic tasks of the Old Testament to be transferred to the Christian leadership.

Other related Greek words found in the Old and New Testaments include *leitourgos* and *leitourgikos*.[9] The former carries a similar cultic sense as *leitourgia*, referring to the people who conduct the service or worship of God. In Hebrews 8:2, Christ is referred to as "a minister [*leitourgos*] in the sanctuary." Similarly in Romans 15:16, Paul describes himself as "a minister of Christ Jesus."[10] The term *leitourgikos* only appears once at Hebrews 1:14 referring to the angels. They are the "ministering spirits sent out to render service [*diakonia*, διακονία] for the sake of those who will inherit salvation."[11]

In summary, according to the biblical and early church usage, the term *leitourgia,* or its English descendent "liturgy," refer to worship or service of God. The other synonym for service is *diakonia*, from which we derive the noun "deacon" and the adjective "diaconal." The biblical usage of the term *leitourgia* and its cognates, suggest a richness of the context in which we might understand the English term "liturgy." *Leitourgia* is understood not only as ministry of God, but also as service. Thus, the biblical distinction between *diakonia* and *leitourgia* is the recipient of the service offered. Diaconal service, in the contemporary sense, includes much of what was understood as liturgy in the Septuagint and New Testament.

The clear distinction between service of God and service of the community, which is found in the New Testament use of *leitourgia* and *diakonia,* is lost in later ecclesiastical usage. Liturgy comes to be understood in the narrow sense of the prescribed ritual actions of the church, while diaconal service is broadened to be understood not only as service to the community, but ultimately as ministerial service to God. Liturgy, in its modern sense, means nothing more than the authorised worship in the church. In recent times, the concept of liturgy has become so narrow that one occasionally hears reference to liturgical and non-liturgical worship. The latter is ostensibly informal

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[9] λειτουργός, λειτουργικός

[10] *leitourgos Christos Jesos,* λειτουργον Χριστου Ίησου

[11] TDNT 4: 230

worship, though it has become the common practice of many churches. The distinction being made here is not between that which is offered to God and something other. Non-liturgical worship has a relaxation of structure and rubric. The fact that much of what is described as non-liturgical worship falls into a regular pattern suggests that ritualisation of worship is a natural human tendency.

The theological disciplines understand liturgy as related specifically to the service of God in worship. Such worship by the community, whether in a formal or informal, gathered or private manner is intimately connected to the life of the community in the world. The Second Vatican Council, in its introduction to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the dogmatic constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, speaks of the liturgy as the core of the Christian experience.

> The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the Church, making of them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ. At the same time it marvelously increases their power to preach Christ and thus show forth the Church, a sign lifted up among the nations, to those who are outside, a sign under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one fold and one shepherd.[12]

The liturgy is understood here not only as the sanctifying rite in which the person comes into the presence of God but also as sending the people forth into the world to sanctify the world, to show the light of Christ to those who have not heard the name of Christ, and to "baptise all nations." Conciliar documents are expected to be somewhat idealistic in their rhetoric. However, this vision of liturgy is a turning point in Roman Catholic theology. No longer are lay people understood as passive recipients of grace mediated to them through the sacramental ministry of clergy. Now laity are understood to share in the apostolic mission of the church, indeed they are to be at the forefront of the efforts of the church in evangelisation.[13]

In the course of history, the relationship of theology and liturgy has resulted in a poverty of liturgical theology to the detriment of dogmatic theology. Similarly, the various phases that dogmatic theology has passed through has directly influenced liturgical theology and the liturgy

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[12] Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), 2 in *Documents of Vatican II*. ed. by Austin Flannery, Vol. 1, *The conciliar and post conciliar documents.* New rev. ed. (Collegeville, Ind.: Liturgical Press, 1992). cf. Eph. 2: 21-22, 4: 13; Jn. 11: 12, 52, 10: 16.

[13] Cf. *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

itself. Alexander Schmemann, an Orthodox theologian, argues that a “scholastic” approach to theology has existed in both the west and the east:

> in which all “organic” connection with worship is severed. Theology here has an independent, rational status; it is a search for a system of consistent categories and concepts: *intellectus fidei*. The position of worship in relation to theology is reversed: from a *source* it becomes an *object*, which has to be defined and evaluated within the accepted categories.[14]

According to Schmemann, in the west the virtual absence of liturgical theology from theological reflection negatively affected the liturgy itself:

> The Reformers protested against the medieval theology of worship, but in spite of their desire for a return to the primitive tradition, they actually replaced [the] medieval doctrine by another theology of worship, so that in the Protestant Churches the *leitourgia* remained a function of its theological conception and interpretation.[15]

Schmemann describes a far broader understanding of liturgy similar to that of the Second Vatican Council. The liturgy, which he understands as the source of theological reflection, involves far more than the authorised ritual actions of the church. The ministry of the priests and deacons, the prayers and service of the people, all are part of the eastern notion of liturgy of which Schmemann speaks. The critique of western liturgical theology that he presents derives from this far broader notion of liturgy, one from which we perhaps might learn.

This brings us to the main theme for this essay. The relationship between liturgy and theology is expressed in the classical adage “*lex orandi lex credendi*.” In the literal sense, the expression means that the law of prayer is equivalent to the law of belief. The truthfulness and applicability of this adage is however worth considering.

II. Lex orandi, lex credendi: a puzzling adage

“*Lex orandi lex credendi*” is based upon the argument used by Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 435-442 AD); a monk who served as a secretary to Leo the Great, and was greatly enamoured with Augustine. In the so-called *Capitula Coelestini*, a work that for many years was attributed first to

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[14] Alexander Schmemann, *Liturgy and tradition*. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 13
[15] Ibid., 14

Celestine I and later to Ambrose, Prosper presents an argument against the Pelagians. In the course of that argument he states:

> In addition to these inviolable decisions of the blessed Apostolic See, by which our most holy fathers, rejecting the arrogance of this harmful novelty, have taught [us] to attribute to the grace of Christ both the first steps of a right will and the necessary progress to a praiseworthy ardor and even the perseverance in these efforts until the end, let us consider equally the rites of the priestly supplications which, transmitted by the apostles, are celebrated in the same manner in the entire world and in the whole catholic Church, in such a way that the order of supplication determines the rule of faith.[16]

The final clause of the quotation – "that the order of supplication determines the rule of faith" – is found in Latin as: "*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*." The common interpretation of the adage holds that the content of prayer is synonymous with the faith of the one praying, such that we can understand the faith of the church by examining the liturgical rubrics in use at any particular time. The *lex orandi* — the law of prayer — is thus understood to be the prescribed liturgical text, which serves as a theological lens to interpret the *lex credendi* – the doctrinal standards.

As reasonable as this sounds, many contemporary theologians believe that the common interpretation is incorrect; the adage has a very different meaning and context.[17] Prosper's remarks refer to I Timothy 2:1-6 where Paul urges "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings," because such things are "right and acceptable in the sight of God ... who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Prosper's *De vocatione omnium gentium* offers an argument similar to his *Capitula*. He refers to Paul's commandment that supplications be made

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[16] Prosper of Aquitaine, *Capitula Coelestini* 8 in Paul De Clerk, "'Lex orandi, lex credendi': The original sense and historical avatars of an equivocal adage". Trans. by Thomas M. Winger. *Studia Liturgica* 24 (1994), 181. "*Praeter beatissimae et apostolicae sedis inviolabiles sanctiones, quibus nos piissimi patres, pestiferae novitatis elatione dejecta, et bonae voluntatis exordia, et incrementa probabilium studiorum, et in eis usque in finem perseverantiam ad Christi gratiam referre docuerunt, obsecrationum quoque sacerdotalium sacramenta respiciamus, quae ab apostolis tradita, in toto mundo atque in omni catholica Ecclesia uniformiter celebrantur, ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi.*" (PL 51: 209-210). A complete English translation is found in Ancient Christian Writers 32, *Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine*. Trans. by P. De Letter (Westminster MD: Newman Press, 1963), 178-85.

[17] I am indebted to two works for much of the history on the following pages: Paul De Clerk's summary article "Lex orandi, lex credendi" and Geoffrey Wainwright's *Doxology: The praise of God in worship, doctrine and life. A systematic theology* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1980). Both authors credit much of the historical research to Karl Federer, *Liturgie und Glaube: eine theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Freiburg in der Schweiz: Paulus-Verlag, 1950).

for all[18] — which De Clerck calls a *regula doctrinae apostolicae*, an apostolic precept that "the universal church obeys everywhere, to such a degree that one cannot find a corner of the world where Christians do not make supplication to God."[19] According to De Clerck, this apostolic precept is promoted to a law by Prosper's "*lex supplicandi*."[20] Thus, it does not refer to the manner of prayer, the rubrics or the liturgical text, which is the common interpretation of the "*lex orandi*" adage.

Both Wainwright and De Clerck find the key to Prosper's argument in the content of the supplications that are enjoined upon all Christians. In each of his texts cited above, Prosper provides a litany of intercessions or bidding prayers, or what are now sometimes called "the prayers of the people." These prayers are offered for the salvation of all people, including infidels, idolaters, Jews, heretics, schismatics, the lapsed and catechumens. The content of the prayer suggests the doctrinal content proposed by Prosper:

> the apostolic injunction [I Tim 2: 1-4] to pray for the whole human race – which the church obeys in its intercessions – proves the obligation to *believe*, with the holy see, that all faith, even the beginnings of good will as well as growth and perseverance, is from start to finish a work of grace.[21]

De Clerck suggests a connection between the argument presented by Prosper and that presented by Augustine, upon whom he is theologically dependent. In *Epistle 177*, Augustine formulates his own axiom: "it is prayer itself which is the most brilliant proof of grace."[22] Augustine's battle with the Pelagians returns him frequently to this liturgical argument, one that Prosper clearly has adopted. In *Epistle 217*, Augustine writes to Vitalis, a Semi-Pelagian. He objects that Vitalis' position contradicts the prayers of the church.[23] Augustine's argument is a liturgical one, unlike Prosper's which turns first to I Timothy. It should also be noted that Augustine does

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18 Prosper of Aquitaine, *De vocatione omnium gentium* 1.12 in De Clerck, 184, note 8: "*Quam legem supplicionis ita omnium sacerdotum et omnium fidelium devotio concorditer tenet, ut nulla pars mundi sit, in qua huius modi orationes non celebrentur a populis christianis*." (PL 51: 664).
19 De Clerck, 184-85.
20 De Clerck, 187 quotes Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in epistolam B. Pauli ad Timotheum primam*. (PL 17: 492A) which describes I Tim 2: 1-4 as a *regula ecclesiastica*, an ecclesiastical rule.
21 Wainwright, *Doxology*, 225
22 Augustine, *Epistle* 177: 4 in De Clerck, 189: "*Ipsa igitur oratio clarissima est gratiae testificatio*" (PL 33: 766)
23 Augustine, *Epistle* 217: 2 (PL 33: 978-79).

not articulate the faith of the church based upon the prayer of the church. Rather, he rejects the teaching of Vitalis because it contradicts the prayer of the church – and thus presumably the faith of the church. His is not a positive argument, but a negative one.

A further source can be found for Prosper's adage. Cyprian of Carthage wrote a commentary on the Lord's Prayer in which he describes it as the norm of Christian prayer – the *lex orationis*.[24] As De Clerck points out, Cyprian was speaking about prayer, not about doctrine. The Lord's Prayer, which is both a biblical text and a liturgical one,[25] is a norm for prayer because it was taught by Jesus. Cyprian was not engulfed in the doctrinal disputes with Pelagians that Augustine and Prosper are concerned with in the later centuries. As such, he does not further develop the liturgical argument that Augustine and Prosper are later to pick up. He does argue, however, that "the efficacy of the sacraments is dependent on the right faith of their minister and recipients."[26] In later western theology, this position is interpreted with emphasis on the term "efficacy." Sacramental reality is not dependent upon the faith of the minister or the recipients, but the fruitfulness of the sacrament is.[27]

De Clerck finds it significant that while Prosper has adopted from Augustine the liturgical argument for the prevalence of God's grace, he insists that liturgical formulas must be "founded on scripture and attested by tradition."[28] Thus, the argument from liturgical precedent is submitted to a further test. Isolated worship experiences do not provide norms for the faith of the church. Rather, it is the uncontested and universal experience of the church at worship that serves as a norm. This is an application of the "always, everywhere and by everyone" test of orthodox belief presented by Vincent of Lérins.[29] De Clerck summarises:

> In [Prosper's] mind, one may have recourse to the prayers of the Church in order to resolve the controversy on grace because they correspond to a biblical mandate, and are the expression of the

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[24] Cyprian of Carthage, *De oratione dominica*, 8 & 20 (PL 4: 524A & 533C).
[25] The Lord's Prayer appears to be a 1st Century liturgical text witnessed to in the Gospels (Mt. 6: 9-13; Lk. 11: 2-4). Biblical scholars may be interested in the redaction of these texts, but Cyprian clearly understood them as Jesus' words.
[26] Wainwright, *Doxology*, 231 citing Cyprian, *Epistle* 69: 7 & 12.
[27] H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1612.
[28] De Clerck, 192
[29] Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* 2: 5 (PL 50: 640): "*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*."

> living tradition of the Church. ... The liturgy is a "theological locus" to the degree that it is founded on scripture and gives of the living tradition its peculiar echo, which is poetic, symbolic, and existential much more than rational.[30]

Although De Clerck interprets Prosper as referring to the liturgy in a narrow sense as the prescribed ritual of the church, the broader understanding of liturgy as presented by Schmemann also witnesses to a richness of theological reflection. Wainwright points to the next chapter in Prosper's *Capitula* where once again an argument from liturgical action is made, in this case to the pre-baptismal exorcisms and exsufflations.[31] "Doctrinal appeal is ... made not only to the word-content of prayers but also to a complex ritual act." The principle established here is that "the liturgy which may serve as a doctrinal locus is the liturgy understood as a total ritual event, not simply a liturgy reduced to its verbal components."[32]

Since the adage, *lex orandi lex credendi*, does not actually appear in the apostolic and post-apostolic writings that we have examined, the claim of later theologians that the adage is of apostolic origin calls for some consideration. The recognition that there is a connection between liturgical action and theological articulation is clearly found as early as Irenaeus: "Our doctrine agrees with the eucharist, and the eucharist confirms the doctrine."[33] As Wainwright explains, Irenaeus found a "general coherence" between sacramental worship and the "catholic" doctrine on creation, humanity, the incarnation and the resurrection. All this comes to "focal expression" in the eucharist.[34]

Obviously, the nature of the relationship between the liturgy and theology is understood differently by the various people that we have looked at. For Cyprian, the Lord's Prayer provides a

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[30] De Clerck, 192-93

[31] cf. Prosper of Aquitaine, *Capitula Coelestini* 9. An exsufflation involved breathing upon the face of the baptismal candidate followed by the command "Go out, unclean spirit!" The exorcism is preserved in the revised Roman Catholic rites of Christian initiation, although the language is changed to reflect a changing understanding of sin and the human person: the exorcism is now called a scrutiny. In its simplest form it involves the baptismal questions: "do you renounce sin?" etc..., and is concluded by a blessing. It is not considered a sacrament. The rite for the baptism of infants addresses the questions to the parents and sponsors. The rites for initiation of adults and children include three scrutinies.

[32] Wainwright, *Doxology*, 227

[33] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4: 18.5 (PG 7: 1028).

[34] Wainwright, *Doxology*, 234

norm for theological articulation. Augustine does not seem to go so far. For him, the liturgy serves as a limiting norm for theology. Prosper's "*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*" implies that the liturgy may be a *locus theologicus* providing direction to the articulation of theology. Irenaeus' brief quote above suggests that a more symbiotic relationship may exist between liturgy and theology. Certainly, this is true for Irenaeus in the isolated example of the Eucharist. However, it is not until more recently that we find the adage turned around such that theology establishes liturgical patterns.

III. Approaches to liturgical theology

Perhaps it seems reasonable to the modern mind that the community's theological consensus should determine the worship patterns of the community. This is, however, of a completely different significance than the opposite view discussed above. The notion that the liturgy supplies normative direction to theology is a methodological principle. To suggest that theology determine the norms for liturgy is a canonical principle. The early origins of canon law are found in the liturgical rubrics and the laws relating to the persons who preside at the sacraments and those who receive them. In some sense, the hierarchical nature of Roman canon law, which differentiates between the status of the laity and those of the three clerical orders, is rooted in the differing liturgical roles of each person. Nevertheless, the *lex orandi lex credendi* adage gets used in both directions, as we shall see.

1. Pius XII and *Mediator Dei*

Munificentissimus Deus, the apostolic constitution on the Assumption of Mary, to which I referred at the beginning of this paper, uses the adage in both ways. Pius XII cites numerous examples of liturgical practices that celebrate the Assumption.[35] He also, however, asserts that the liturgical practices were authorised by the various relevant authorities, particularly his predecessors.[36] Furthermore, he cites patristic and scholastic theologians in support of the proposed dogma.[37] While

[35] *Munificentissimus Deus*, 15-18
[36] Ibid., 19
[37] Ibid., 20-23 & 24-37 respectively

he obviously feels it important to cite the historical durability of the Marian cult, it is theological evidence that seems to be most important to him. In his earlier encyclical *Mediator Dei* on the sacred liturgy, he also cites Prosper's adage "*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*." The context of Pius XII's reference to Prosper is the ongoing dispute with:

> those who have claimed that the sacred liturgy is a kind of proving ground for the truths of faith, meaning by this that the Church is obliged to declare such a doctrine sound when it is found to have produced fruits of piety and sanctity through the sacred rites of the liturgy, and to reject it otherwise.[38]

He is referring to the modernists, a theological movement that the Roman Catholic magisterium was still not comfortable with at the time of the writing of this encyclical. Although some of the concerns of the modernists are represented in the encouragement of biblical study in Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943 and in *Mediator Dei* itself, even while responding to their concerns he is careful to criticise their positions. Pius XII understands the liturgy to have a substantial doctrinal content. He affirms that:

> In the sacred liturgy we profess the Catholic faith explicitly and openly, not only by the celebration of the mysteries, and by offering the holy sacrifice and administering the sacraments, but also by saying or singing the credo or Symbol of the faith – it is indeed the sign and badge, as it were, of the Christian – along with other texts, and likewise by the reading of holy scripture, written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The entire liturgy, therefore, has the Catholic faith for its content, inasmuch as it bears public witness to the faith of the Church.[39]

For Pius, the liturgy appears to be not so much a *locus theologicus* as a *locus evangelicus.* The liturgy is one place in which we profess our faith. Interestingly, he treats in the same manner sacraments, creeds, liturgical texts and the public reading of scripture – as "profession of faith." Obviously, each of these has a liturgical character. The scriptures and the creeds have uses outside of the liturgy, but they are nevertheless first and foremost liturgical texts. Creeds primarily serve a liturgical function and only secondarily a theological function.[40] Public reading and preaching of scripture is

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[38] Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947), 46

[39] Ibid., 47

[40] The fundamental difference between the ancient creeds and the reformation confessions is their liturgical usage. Many of the 16th century confessions are inappropriate for liturgical usage due to their length and their heavily theological language. However, some reformation documents lend themselves quite nicely to the structure and discipline of worship. Luther's *Small Catechism* has been used in Lutheran circles for both catechesis and worship. Donald W.

normative, it is, as Pius tells us, "the sign and badge ... of the Christian." The development of the Old and New Testament canons testifies to the role of worship in the canonicity of the biblical texts. The canon of scripture is simply the list of books approved and recommended for reading in the public worship of the community.

As in his later text defining the dogma of the Assumption, in *Mediator Dei* Pius XII admits the importance of the earlier liturgical usage as an element in the theological reflection. He provides as his sole example Pius IX's definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This presumably is because that dogma is so clearly dependent upon liturgical practice. The dependency of both of these Marian dogmas upon the liturgical evidence is significant. Geoffrey Wainwright suggests that:

> The theological neglect of the *lex orandi, lex credendi* theme among Protestant writers may in fact be due to the use which Roman Catholic theologians have made of the tag in predominantly the reverse direction: Catholics have appealed to past and present liturgical practice in order to justify doctrinal positions and developments which Protestants have considered unacceptable.[41]

Strangely, for a document on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei* is far more interested in the doctrinal control of liturgy than the reverse. Having cited the example of Pius IX mentioned above, which is an application of Prosper's *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* adage, Pius XII proceeds to turn the adage inside out. He states clearly:

> The sacred liturgy ... does not decide or determine independently and of itself what is of Catholic faith. ... [I]f one desires to differentiate and describe the relationship between faith and the sacred liturgy in absolute and general terms, it is perfectly correct to say, "*Lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi*" – let the rule of belief determine the rule of prayer.[42]

This is precisely the approach subsequently taken by the Second Vatican Council's reforms of the liturgy, as by various liturgical reforms and developments through history. One particular example cited in *Mediator Dei* is the reform of the sacrament of penance. As the theological understanding of sin and forgiveness changed, the early medieval church began to explore liturgical patterns that

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Johnson's recent setting of the *Small Catechism* as a daily prayer book for the adult catechumenate continues this usage (*Praying the Catechism*. Winnipeg: Wallingford Press, 1997).

[41] Wainwright, *Doxology*, 219

[42] *Mediator Dei*, 48

reflected the new understanding. As noted above, the notion that theological reflection determines the worship patterns of the community is not difficult to accept. The connection of this principle to papal authority is more difficult, however. Like Prosper before him, Pius insists that the Roman liturgy is the normative western liturgy, in relation to which the other rites are authorised divergences.[43] Presumably, Protestant liturgies would be seen as illegitimate due in part to the lack of Roman consent.

As Wainwright points out, Pius IX had also turned the adage around. In 1854, with his apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, Pius IX defined the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Pius believes that his predecessors had introduced the Marian doctrine of the Immaculate Conception into the preface of the Mass, and promoted the December 8 feast so that "the law of belief might be established by the law of prayer."[44] As Wainwright understands this, a new *lex orandi* was deliberately introduced by previous popes in order to promote the doctrine. The argument is thus circular: the earlier popes introduce liturgical practices that are seen to conform to the *lex credendi*, and subsequent popes use that new *lex orandi* as the basis to amplify the doctrinal support for the original *lex credendi*.[45]

2. Theologia prima

In contrast to Pius XII and his predecessors, the liturgical movement of the twentieth century offers a perspective that understands liturgy as the human response to the primordial experience of God's presence, action and revelation. It is the symbolic expression of the same truths that we dimly grasp in our conscious theological reflection. During the early stages, in the 1920's to 1950's, the liturgical movement was marked by an almost scientific historicism that allowed the unrestrained exploration of the sources of the liturgy, a contribution that – together with similar studies in dogmatic theology — has come to be called *ressourcement*. The achievements of this stage of the movement set the foundations upon which the liturgical reforms of the 1960's to 1980's

[43] The Holy See authorises three other western rites: the Ambrosian, Gallican and Mezorabic. This is in addition to some twenty-three eastern rites used by the Eastern Catholic churches.
[44] "*atque adeo lex credendi ipsa supplicandi lege statuetur*" as quoted by Wainwright, 239 and note 582.
[45] Ibid., 238

could be accomplished. It was in this first stage that the earlier notion of "*lex orandi lex credendi*" was retrieved. The adage was clearly known prior to the liturgical movement, as evidenced by Pius IX's reference in *Ineffabilis Deus* in 1854. However, the adage was generally interpreted such that doctrine controls liturgy. As Schmemann points out, ressourcement inevitably leads to reform.[46] Schmemann, however, regrets that the *aggiornamento* focussed more on liturgical reform than theological reform.

Unlike the liturgical reformers that Schmemann decries, there are some theologians who treat liturgy as both a source and location for theological reflection. Schmemann himself began to outline the structure of such a theological method in the years before he died. Others have drawn upon his contribution. In this last section of the paper, we will explore a few of the central contributions of these theologians. We begin with Schmemann.

Schmemann speaks of the Christian *leitourgia* as the "abolishment of cult."[47] My earlier exploration of the etymology of liturgy comes in helpful at this point. The temple worship was based upon a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Cultic worship was a means of reaching the sacred. However, Schmemann says, "the Church is not a natural community which is 'sanctified' through the cult." In the world, but not of the world,

> [i]n its essence the Church is the presence, the actualization in this world of the "world to come," in this *aeon* – of the Kingdom. And the mode of this presence, of this actualization of the new life, the new *aeon*, is precisely the *leitourgia*. ... The *leitourgia* ... is the action of the Church itself, or the Church *in actu*, it is the very expression of its life.[48]

The "cult" is the only way in which the sacred — the eschaton – can be expressed in this world. The church must use the "forms and language of the cult, in order eternally to transcend the cult, to 'become what it is.' It is this ... that we call sacrament."[49] The essential function of the

[46] Schmemann, 139
[47] Ibid., 16
[48] Ibid., 16-17
[49] Ibid., 17-18

eschatological character of the Christian cult "is to *realize* the church by revealing her as the epiphany of the kingdom of God."[50]

> Whether it be the sacraments, or the liturgical year, ... or the week lived in remembrance of and in waiting for the Eighth Day, the Day of the Lord; it is always this eschatological reality, this foretaste, this anticipation of the Kingdom of God, which is offered to us by the liturgy.[51]

Because liturgy is the "sole and unique source and realization" of this experience, it "is possible to say that liturgical theology has as its proper domain or 'object' eschatology itself."[52] The eschatological focus of Schmemann's reflections is of interest, but does not speak directly to our concern here. However, his assertion that the essence of the church is the actualisation in this world of the eschaton, ties into his notion that the liturgy is the only source of this experience. Liturgy is the source for theology, and not vice versa.

The next theologian to whom we turn is Aidan Kavanagh, a Benedictine monk widely read in both liturgical theology and liturgical studies. Kavanagh understands liturgy as an experience of being brought "to the brink of chaos in the presence of the living God."[53] He observes that: "what results in the first instance from [liturgical] experience is deep change in the very lives of those who participate in the liturgical act. And deep change will affect their next liturgical act, however slightly." Kavanagh does not clarify what the nature of this deep change might be. But, change builds upon change. "This adjustment causes the next liturgical act to be in some degree different from its predecessor because those who do the next act have been unalterably changed." The liturgical rites evolve gradually in response to the ever-changing experience. "It is the *adjustment* that is theological in all this. I hold that it is theology being born, theology in the first instance. It is what tradition has called *theologia prima*."[54]

Kavanagh speaks almost petulantly about the need to recognise the primacy of liturgical experience. He argues that:

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[50] Ibid., 142
[51] Ibid., 143
[52] Ibid., 143
[53] Aidan Kavanagh, *On liturgical theology*. (New York, N.Y.: Pueblo Publishing, 1984), 74.
[54] Ibid., 73-74

> theology at its genesis is communitarian, even proletarian; that it is aboriginally liturgical in context, partly conscious and partly unconscious; that it stems from an experience of near chaos; that it is long term and dialectical; and that its agents are more likely to be charwomen and shopkeepers than pontiffs and professors.[55]

Kavanagh is not presenting an uncritical grassroots liturgical theology. He grounds his perspectives in a phenomenology of ritual based on the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss.[56] Kavanagh refers to Lévi-Strauss' theory of language. He suggests that when exploring a liturgy different from one's previous experience, one must "learn new vocabulary, alien grammar, different syntax."[57] He suggests, following Lévi-Strauss, that one can detect "common laws according to which linguistic, mythic, and liturgical systems function." Nevertheless, Kavanagh is not interested in the underlying meaning; instead, he is interested in the structure itself. It is the structure that is timeless, that transcends the context. When doctrine controls the liturgy, it does violence to the underlying structure. He sees this doctrinal control in the liturgical uniformity that developed following the Council of Trent. Similarly, he cites the English Act of Uniformity (1549).

The unwarranted separation between doctrine and liturgy allows "second order" doctrinal language to take priority over first order liturgical language. Liturgy is associated with the aesthetic and educational functions of theology. It becomes didactic. "The liturgy no longer serves as the constitutive foundation for secondary theology [doctrine], but is reduced to a doxological *envoi* which concludes the secondary enterprise and is controlled by it."[58] This is nonsense to Kavanagh.

> It makes a shambles of the dialectic of revelation. ... It was a Presence, not faith, which drew the disciples to Jesus, and what happened then was not an educational program but his revelation to them of himself. ... Their lives ... were changed radically by that encounter which upended all their ordinary expectations. Their descendants in faith have been adjusting to that change ever since.[59]

Both Kavanagh and Schmemann understand liturgy as giving insight into the revelation of God in a way that is privileged and unique. It is unique in the sense that it is an experience of the Christian

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[55] Ibid., 74-75
[56] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*. (New York, Anchor Books, 1967).
[57] Kavanagh, 80
[58] Ibid., 83
[59] Ibid., 92

that is unlike any other religious experience. It is privileged in the sense that it takes priority over other theological sources and methods. Kavanagh insists that:

> the creed and the reasoning which produced them are not the forces which produced baptism. Baptism gave rise to the trinitarian creeds. So too the eucharist produced, but was not produced by, a scriptural text, the eucharistic prayer, or all the scholarly theories concerning the eucharistic real presence.[60]

For both of these theologians, liturgy is somewhat different from the liturgical text. The text is a product of the reasoned reflection upon the experience. Liturgy is the experience itself. In this sense, the liturgy stands apart from the tradition.

For both Kavanagh and Schmemann, liturgy is the source from which theology draws. Kavanagh draws upon the insights of the phenomenological studies current in anthropology, linguistics and other social sciences. Schmemann too draws upon the insights of the social sciences, although he does not seem to be as bound by them. He gives greater significance to the eschatological character of the liturgy. Where Kavanagh understands the liturgy to be a growing and changing context for the primordial experience of God's presence in us and revelation to us, Schmemann understands liturgy as the bridge between human experience and the experience of the divine. His liturgical anthropology is completely eastern. Liturgy is the vehicle for personal and communal deification.

IV. Conclusion

In many respects, Schmemann and Kavanagh are saying different things. However, at certain basic points they agree. They recognise that the religious experience – which Christians call liturgy – is separate from interpretation – which is called theology. Furthermore, they believe that experience informs interpretation and not vice versa. It is this latter point that calls for some critique.

To understand experience completely independent of interpretation seems counter-intuitive. Clearly, the typical person participating in liturgical acts does not have the scholarly perspective or

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[60] Ibid., 92

apparatus that theologians habitually employ. Nevertheless, no religious experience of a sentient person can be completely divorced from the reflective process. The fundamental religious experiences of awe and wonder are themselves reflective. Furthermore, religious experiences are rarely isolated. Experience evokes further experience, and draws its meaning from earlier experience. Religious experience is highly symbolic, drawing its symbolic meaning from past experiences. These past experiences provide meaning to later experiences through recognition of cognitive harmony or dissonance.

There is another objection to the presumption that liturgy is *theologia prima*. Liturgy is part of the living tradition of the church. Still, the tradition contains more than the liturgy, such as theological reflection and teaching. The liturgy, on the other hand, also has elements that are not part of the tradition of the church. Liturgy would be a dead concept if it did not embrace all that is truly religious in the experience of the human person. Many religious experiences are isolated, private and personal and thus do not contribute to the living communitarian tradition that Kavanagh considers the *locus theologicus.* Certainly, Kavanagh makes an important point when he insists that every religious experience changes us, and that we bring that change – which he calls an adjustment – to our subsequent religious experiences, theological reflections, and ministry. If it were as simple as this, then liturgy would definitely be the *theologia prima.* However, this does not account for witness and catechesis. Surely, religious education cannot be understood as a first-order religious experience of the sort that Kavanagh describes. Yet, many or most people structure their religious convictions and commitment upon the theological data – doctrines – that they receive in Sunday school, bible study and didactic sermons.[61] Their experience of liturgy is influenced by these convictions and commitments. The question at issue is not the nature of the experiences, but the source of the "structures" with which they interpret the experiences. It seems clear that for many people the source of theological reflection is the didactic rather than experiential aspects of the

[61] The distinctions between a Protestant sermon and a Catholic homily are normally moot. However, the sermon tends to have a more didactic style, while the homily is intended to be more reflective. The difference in style is as subtle as the difference between preachers.

received tradition. Nevertheless, Schmemann and Kavanagh offer a salutary warning that theological reflection is dead without the living experience of God's presence.

Further conclusions regarding liturgy are evident from the material that I have surveyed above. These might be formulated as a series of theses:

Firstly, liturgy is service. While *leitourgia* has come to be understood as worship, the broader context in which worship is conceived is as service. Service of God and service of humanity. The broad focus that Schmemann expresses is representative of eastern theology in general. Similarly, the *aggioramento* of Vatican II witnesses to a notion of liturgy as the calling and sending forth in mission to the world.

Secondly, liturgy is tradition. Properly understood, liturgy is more than the liturgical text and rubrics, it is the whole ritual act, it is the dramatic expression and experience of symbolic meaning. The text and rubrics are products of the institutional impulses and theological reflections of the community throughout its history. This tradition provides a normative source for the theological reflection upon the religious experience.

Thirdly, liturgy shares a symbiotic relationship with theology. The liturgy is the visible expression of the primordial religious experience that is simultaneously articulated theologically. The liturgy provides the focus of the reflective concern of liturgical theology, and theology provides the categories or structure with which the participants make sense of the experience.

In the end, Prosper's adage remains as equivocal as it has been for sixteen centuries. The *lex orandi* clearly influences the *lex credendi*, and vice versa. This conclusion is not unexpected. It seems like common sense.

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